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General debate on national experience in population matters: realizing the future we want — integrating population issues into sustainable development, including in the post-2015 development agenda

Statement submitted by German Foundation for World Population, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Call for a stronger commitment to the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the largest youth generation of all time

Today's youth generation is the largest in history. Moreover, the number of 10- to 24-year-olds will continue to grow to over two billion by 2050 with 89 per cent living in low- and middle-income countries (according to the 2012 Revision of the *World Population Prospects*). Much has been said and written about the potential of these countries to cash in on the demographic dividend if sufficient investments in the rights, health, education and employment of young people are made. Still, many development strategies thus far do not adequately consider projections of future population dynamics, and political commitment for the rights and needs of young people in many countries is severely lacking. The purpose of this statement is to emphasize the urgent need to integrate specifically the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in the post-2015 development agenda in order to ensure prospering populations and sustainable development for the future.

Population dynamics create a number of political as well as societal challenges, especially in the area of assuring nutrition, universal access to quality health coverage, education and training, as well as for technical and social infrastructure. These challenges need to be met with strategically sound, evidence-based policies and planning which protect human rights and individual choices. It is part of the basic human rights to have access to information, to health and to decide freely and consciously if, when and with whom to have children and how many.

Yet, 225 million women today have an unmet need for contraception due to coercion, stigma, discrimination or lack of accessibility. Every year, 7.3 million girls under the age of 18 bear a child, while complications during pregnancy or childbirth are among the leading causes of death for girls between 15 and 19. Many of these girls are denied the opportunity to develop their potential to earn their livelihood or contribute to the socio-economic development of their countries.

These and many other statistics highlight the serious consequences when the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people are not ensured. And they show what we see every day as a non-profit organisation working in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Addressing the challenges mentioned above, our work centres on development programmes, advocacy, and awareness-raising. In this capacity, we work together with governments, administration, local communities and leaders, health workers and facilities, parents and teachers, as well as the youth themselves (primarily in the context of peer-to-peer youth clubs). We thus know from experience how crucial legal frameworks, infrastructure and financial investment are to facilitate change on the ground, particularly in settings most affected by poverty.

Building on the above, the Deutsche Stiftung Weltbevoelkerung (German Foundation for World Population) wishes to impress upon member states to prioritise the following issues:

1. Achievement of universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights for all — irrespective of sex, ethnicity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other factors.

2. Investment in gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to ensure women's and girls' rights and to enable them to decide freely how and whom to live with, which career to choose, or if and when to have children and how many.

3. Availability of high-quality primary and secondary education, including comprehensive sexuality education, for both girls and boys in and out of school to allow them to make informed decisions about their lives.

4. Improvement of data collection and analysis to include disaggregation based on sex, age, geographic location, economic quintile, and marital status, so that development strategies reflect future size, age structure, and geographical distribution of their populations.

With a view to the recent and ongoing international processes leading to the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda, which will be adopted at the Special Summit on Sustainable Development in New York in September 2015, we put forward the following recommendations:

1. The outcomes of the ICPD operational and regional review as well as the Secretary-General's report need to be reflected in the goals, targets, and indicators, as Member States have consistently affirmed, for example by calling for the ICPD Programme of Action to live on in the post-2015 development framework at the forty-seventh session of the Commission on Population and Development in April 2014 and the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on the follow-up to the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development beyond 2014 in September 2014.

2. The recommendations put forth by the Open Working Group for the Sustainable Development Goals should serve as the basis of the intergovernmental negotiations of the post-2015 development agenda.

3. Going beyond the OWG report, however, the post-2015 development agenda must address the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the most vulnerable and/or marginalized groups, such as children and youth, as well as the elderly, disabled, and indigenous people. This includes providing comprehensive sexuality education to all young people, in and out of school.

4. We welcome the report of the Secretary-General "The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet" in that it demands adequate means of implementation and financing, as well as sufficient data disaggregation. However, the report falls short on addressing the root causes of gender inequality that hamper the full realisation of women's and girls' rights, true gender equality and empowerment. Commitment to tackling these root causes must not be lost in the reframing of the OWG report around "essential elements" as suggested in the Secretary General's report.

Only if states are mindful of population dynamics, putting a focus on young people and their sexual and reproductive health and rights, will they be able to tap into the potential of the demographic dividend to reduce poverty and improve quality of life for their populations. Already in the Millennium Development Goals, these issues were not given adequate attention, even though investments in this area are among those with the highest return on investment, and even though these issues are inherent in the universal human rights of all people. The window of opportunity is closing fast. It is therefore essential that the above-mentioned aspects are considered for the post-2015 development agenda as the primary framework for shaping the future of this planet and its people in the coming years.